

CROP ROTATION

A VOLUME OF POETRY



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The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are the angels.

- Matthew 13: 38-39

The Johnsons are planted next to the Rodinskis,
the Armegenians are planted next to Frederick T. Baer.

This will last for a cenury.
maybe more, without protest

from anyone,
the management or the squirrels.
Hundreds of people, thousands perhaps--

children of children of children
of children, and several eccentric uncles
wearing inappropriate vests, will file past.

The sun will approve,
trees will grow a little.

Cynthia Rodinski, 1907-1985,
will be slowly imprisoned
by complex root systems.

At night, the moon will peer.

The Johnsons will divorce
of natural causes-- soil shifts
and a lowering water table.

These same shifts will force Frederick T. Baer
to perform a headstand for 126 years
until his neck snaps mercifully.

Mars will scowl from afar.

Walter Rodinski alone is dead.
He lives in Heaven's ignorant bliss
with a woman whom he believes to be his wife.

How he would cry
to learn otherwise.

I.

Winter's last gasp slips through
the windowpane, an unformed
word from greying lips.

Masses of warm snow crawl across
the grass, rotting albino
flounder shrinking to the sea,

eyes turned earthward; moist soil
churns out new worms and chipmunks
drunk with post-hibernal hunger.

People start getting ideas.

Radio waves skitter across
the nitrogen atmosphere,
celebrating the waking dead.

Lazarus will walk
for nine agonizing months,
then sleep again, cold and dry.

II.

The city's rain,
revolted by

her gaudy
petroleum hues,

terrorized by the gravitational
pull of a death march

to the poison
harbor, slinks

into a pothole
praying,

too heavy
to evaporate.

III.

An aged moral eel curses
fate in his recessed murkdom.
Life hasn't changed in 2000 years.

Capture, chomp, devour, digest.

Jailed behind snow
shovels, barbeque ovens begin
their insidious domination
of aspiring neighborhood heroes.

Cows march into the slaughterhouse.

Seeds, happy to be seeds,
are thrown from the farmer's
warm hand, crushed under his feet,
and later trampled by machinery.

Local cemetery workers sigh

contentedly, their spades sliding
through the dirt with newfound ease.
Life hasn't changed in 2000 years!

Friday nights
kenosha's young hookies are down
by peach blossom reservoir--

bathed in blue
light sprawled across kingdom
come, going
quietly as millenia.

Erwin M.,
whose surname remains unrevealed,
goes there to touch a girlfriend's nerve,

she softly
says, he's not entirely successful but
sweet, sweetly
peach blossom gentle.

Gentle
M., blessedly pre-complete and evening
reservoir peach blossom sweet,

dreams quietly
a cross bathed in light--
going, coming,
sprawled across millenia in blue

friday nights
when kenosha's young hookies are down
by peach blossom reservoir.

the japanese maple

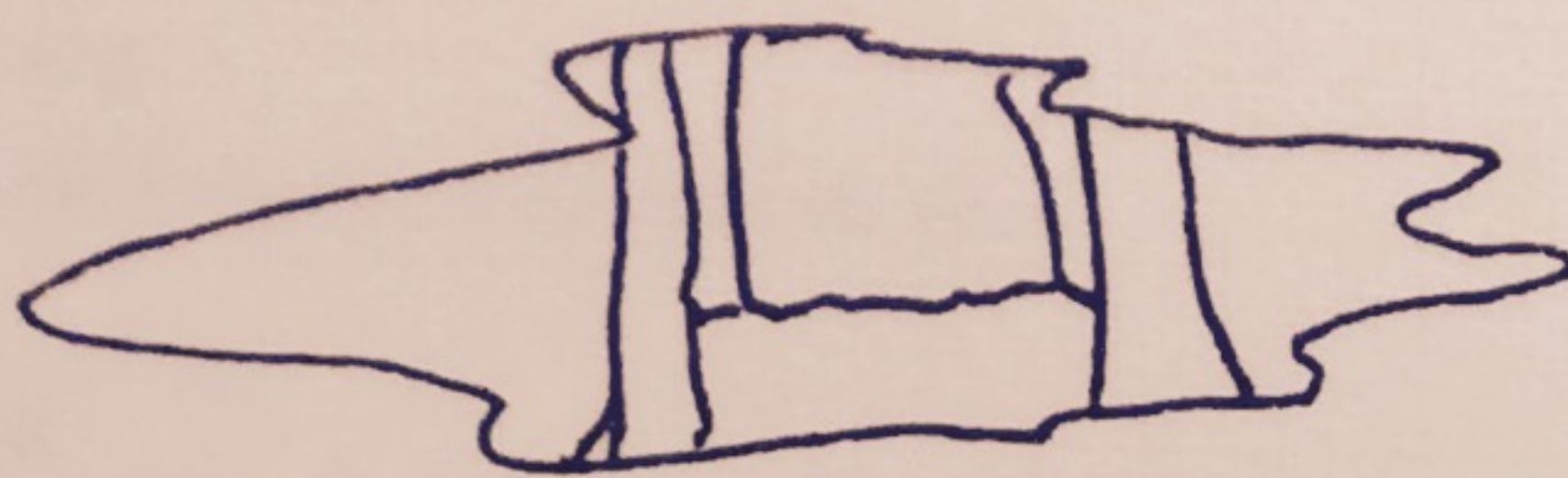
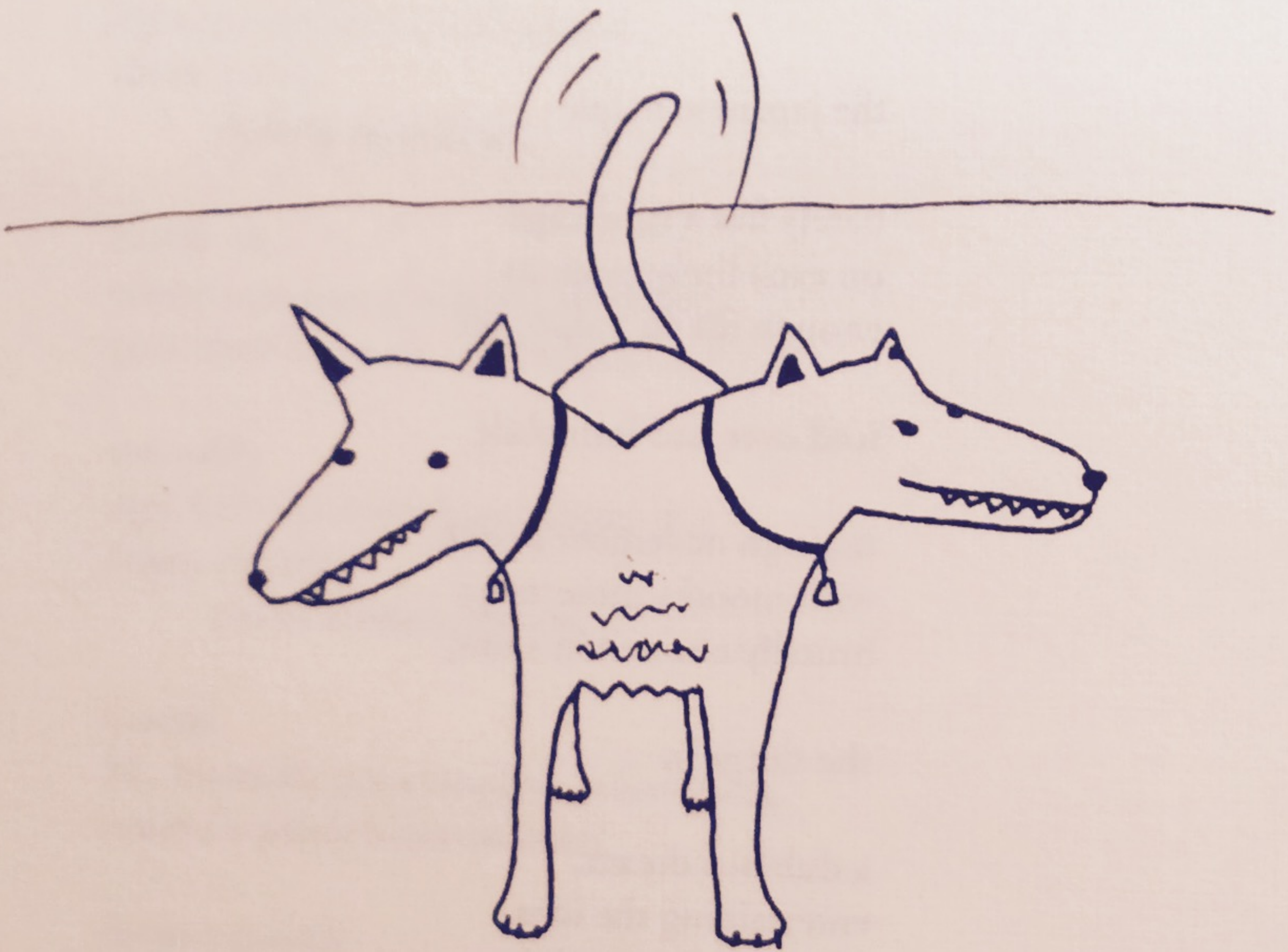
barely has a landscape
on each limb spacious
enough for an aphid, yet

iced over and immobile

through november's cold
with months more to go
brutally encased in snow,

she sleeps in

a dubious dream,
entertaining the idea
of someday conceiving coconuts.



I am a dog
named Businessman
who eats

His

scraps and
wags his hand and
me

who's a dog
named Other Guy
who wants
my slice of the

Shepherd's

pie.
Both of us are the same
and alone,
a two-headed dog
chewing up the wrong bones.

We are the dog playing
dead south of Sidon
who looks
at the ground
when in search of
the sky. In a puddle,
once, I thought I saw

God

my master
sin
king
into the sod.

Bauzys' brow is the horizon,
where sweat beads
between plowlines

and the sickle
seeks fresh stalks.
Our stomachs are full

of bread and onions,
our legs too heavy
for dancing.

The young mother
tells a story
to the field:

You were once
a dimple-chinned
child swimming

mid-air like a young bird
pushed from the nest.
Your fingers reached

into the earth, plucking
sweet green onions
for the evening's broth.

You would lick dirt
from your nails
and we would laugh!

You would stamp on
the ground, making
onion wine,

but the soil developed
an early appetite for you,
and under it you've grown

rich and strong.
You are a broad field
of onions, resting

under moonlight,
swimming in the rain,
whistling in the west wind,

and I am your mother.

It entered the room
from his heart up

through the boiling
glottal well,

a baritone rumble,
a steamer from Sweden

docking on the dinner table
with a cargo of faith and war,

theology and industry, words
breathed from cracked lips,

and he bore down upon them
with engineer's determination,

pressures churned in still air,
fingers clutched flesh and sought

more, our gracious heavenly
father emerged from a squall

each foggy morning in the metal
chorus of a moaning hull

to a family at ease
and attention. Amen.

I sat bewildered
with a magazine, listening
to my grandmother sing

hymns in the shower,
supposing myself
upside-down and she
rightside-up, flipping

my eleven year-old eyes
transfixedly through
pages of magnificently-
breasted female hunters
in a scientific journal

as water dripped from
the floor and splattered
on the ceiling, savoring
sweet apple juice

from a disposable cup
and quietly gunning
for the lion

to lie down with the lamb.
My grandmother emerged, squeaky
clean, and I fell asleep

with my nose
between the pages.
She passed away last year.



♦ PAUL, MY LANDLADY'S LOVER ♦
AND DRINKING COMPANION

Thorn in the flesh, this life, he'll tell you.
But don't filter that pain-- breathe it, live it, he says.

"Or shut up
and die."

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly
met at his birthday party and became friends.

They became his friends,
and with friends like that...

They became his guardian angels
and, alternately, his guardian demons.

They golf with him.
In the neighborhood lawns and gardens, that's who he's with.

They are his handicap--
his unfair advantage.

Partners for life. Something he can grab.
Reality insurance.

He is not just some crazy old lonely fool
wielding a 9-iron in the Doyle's tulips.

And if you think he is, he'll tell you
you must be some crazy old lonely fool.

Paul smiles, and drags back at his pleasures.
Today is a good day-- a real day.

Paul takes his life
with a pinch of death.

You behaved badly today,
reducing garage doors to rumored wisps
of splinters and hinges, banishing dogs
to closets and stealing two old ladies,
their lonely canes clanking on the ground.

I saw your blackening palm,
your greedy fingertips
swiveling with nervous delight from jumpy
knuckles, the tightening of your chaotic grip,
and I heard the icy vow you spat
in stone on the Oldsmobile.

I have a vow for you,
my love: I will be
a chainsaw in the sky,
unwelcome mediator
between pressure systems.
I will reduce you
to barometric myth
trapped in a textbook.

I will show you unchartable storms--
the beating of a human heart

thrust into your world
of electric snakes

whipping the ground
with blue rattles,

hidden schnauzers, dejected
grandsons and ruined Oldsmobiles.

I will observe your hand again
and again, memorize its lumbering

textures, search for the place
to poke clear through.

Smallman Bob
sits indianstyle
on the sidewalk outside
my House.
Squinting tighter than his shoelaces,
trying to break beyond the reflections
so he can see my

Dog.

But it will never work,
and he will never see my

Dog.

"My Dog is invisible,
and He tends to stay that way."
I told Bob that.
I told the Smallman to watch out,
lest he get what he's asking for.
Best he go look in some other fellow's Window
for a while.
I like to keep Mine Shut.

The boughs were black

after noon, the robin

steaming in the sun

seeking moist cessation

grey flesh to sooth,

ventured from her gnarl

three months without

a raspy red throat.

We walked to the park

to see how he was--

to visit an old friend

a big pile of anti-matter

with wooden arms.

Before my eyes
understood
they needed glasses

my mother was a ghost
in blue sweatpants
picking weeds

from between
the tulips, and
the local Armenians

who ate grapeleaves
ripped from
our August vines

were black-eyed
romantics whose
secrets I presumed

could not be seen.
My mother
is neither

a wine-drinker nor
a ghost;
the Armenians had

pulled of the road
in a Volkswagon
with my mother's consent.

But I was 45 inches tall
upside-down, unconscious
and content--

forked tip
of a grapevine
thrust out

my mouth, eyes closed--
sucking for all
it was worth.

She was oddly
taken with me
in an army green

gunny sack slung over
our parents' shoulders.
We were refugees

from the sitting room
which, on Sunday afternoons,
was conquered by

Aleksandr Nevsky.
His minor armies
overthrew the couch,

his regiments occupied
the wing chairs while his
legions took the piano

by surprise. We refugees
(and, no, we won't be
coming back) were

ignorant amidst attack
that Uncle Joseph's dead
and old. He's not

the one who trampled
over the Baltic
steppes, over battle haunts

nor this May Day morning
flaunts missiles
that can kill

a man, plus a million
pals and relatives.
Sleeping like babies

freshly launched,
we were silo suckers
from the start.

The grizzly old man is following
us around again, with his saliva

streaked cheek, ghastly little hobble,
marble eyes and nosehair burning

red, shuffling out footsteps
to the sound of swimming violins

in limitless space;
he's chasing us down

with an outstretched palm,
a crumpled dollar, a new fence

for your impoverished goat,
a promise to replace the old sun

with a better, brighter one,
an insurance policy, an idea.

And if we take it,
in this process

of removing the stars,
perhaps, he says,

we shall know night without
the distraction of distant glitters
or sleepless reflection

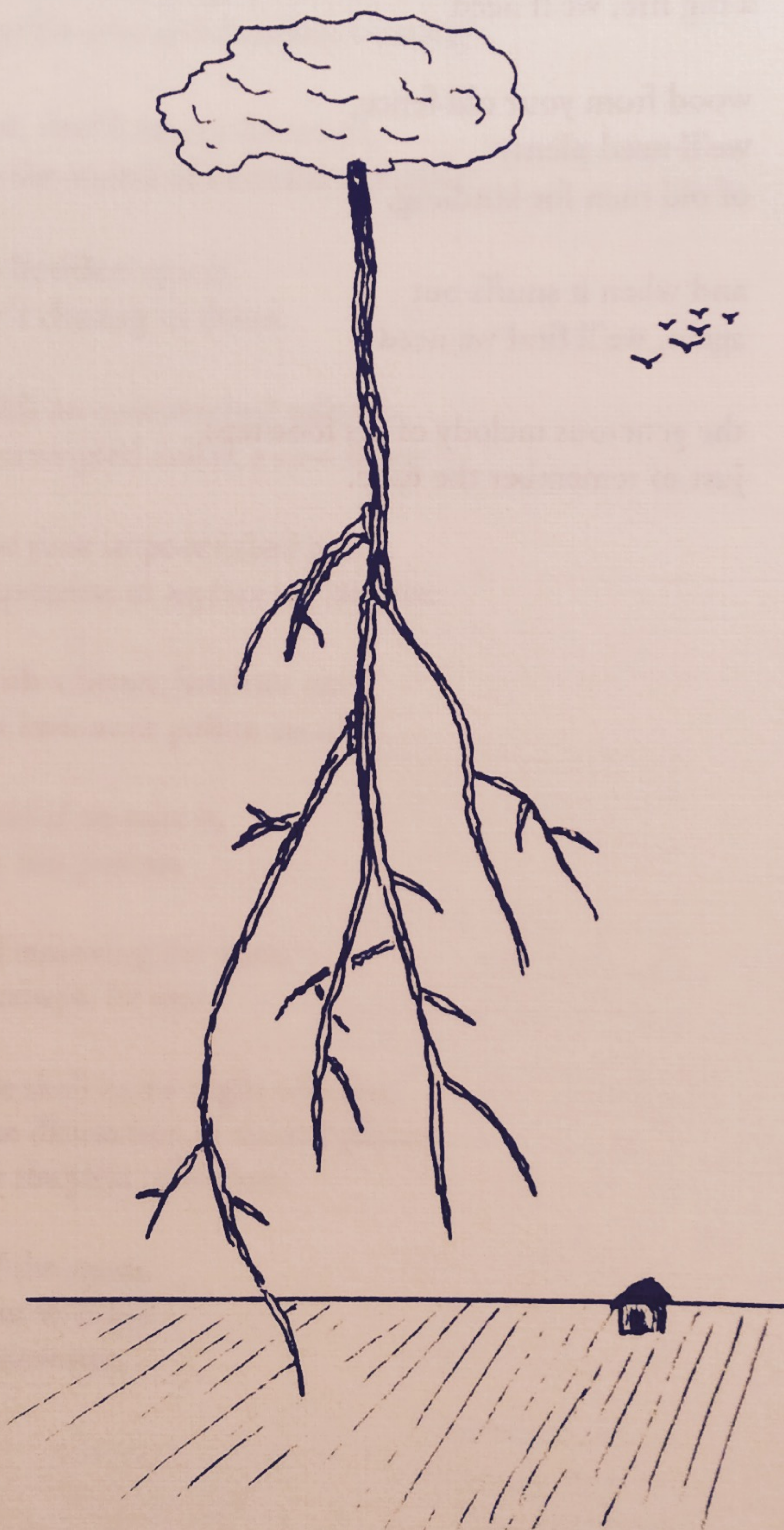
of the moon.
But to build
a new sun,

we'll need fire,
and to build
a big fire, we'll need

wood from your old fence,
we'll need plenty
of old men for kindling,

and when it snuffs out
again, we'll find we need

the generous melody of his footsteps
just to remember the tune.



She'll write off this page
before surrendering to its trap,
skeptical of whether
wind, rain or thunderclap's

indicative of anything
that Heaven has to offer
outside the lightning gun-bolt
with which He'll inevitably off her.

Her lines are so persuading.
(Damnation is so deep.)
Love is too expensive,
and love like this, so cheap.

My mouth is clamped.
My head, it aches.
My pen is running dry.

Oh, how stinking silent
a Devil's advocate am I.

Scientists have conceived
lenses through which men
may safely observe God's
infamously blinding nightshirt.

Officials have conspired
to distribute them
throughout the citizenry
in preparation for judgement.

Families gleefully await
stingless death as they do
the tangible, enticing
mysteries of Christmas morning,

cheering on elders to hasten
their expiration, to cash
in on a lifetime's insatiable
appetite for knowledge.

Curious nations race
headlong toward vision
as consumers flood opticians
in search of the perfect frames.

Artists claiming reincarnation
produce sketches from recollection
of the old man's face, and churches
retouch their icons accordingly.

Wealthy parishoners dream of
posh heavenly mansions, opulent
eternal lifestyles, extending advance
invitations to exclusive cocktail soirées.

Benevolent angels swoop down,
warning of disaster, but
their pleas drown in
the stew of hysterical chatter.

Deathbeds are rapidly inhabited and abandoned.

Erwin M. pokes timidly
up the marble staircase.
Through the lenses, he discerns
something dark and unexpected.

Maybe Bela
Bartok
could dance

to the
mikrokosmos
midst a war

of phones
and ethics
in a Hungary

once
unsung, explore
what morbid

intervals
the rest
of us

ignore and lie
within
the off

beat of
a funeral
drum

What is
it that makes
Hungarian blood

hounds follow
your echoing

thud?

Paul stares up
from bed at the portrait
of Grandma. He is ready

for the morning lecture.
As always, she speaks
of sin and golfing

on the Sabbath.
He cannot logically
reconcile the two.

She goes on about
the tragedy of divits
and the sanctity

of God's creation.
Paul snores away.
Grandma is irate.

Unable to reawaken
him, she falls
silent in time.

Hours pass.
Paul rolls over.
Grandma poses

in Punjab, circa 1894.
Later that day on
the empty links,

physics betrays the aging
idiot, the jet stream
rushes furiously west.

Gravity is increased
twofold, vectors of
inertia are inverted.

Conservation of mass
suspends itself, the sea
and sky trade places.

With an anxious
whack, Paul disappears
in a cloud of pale dust.

In his silent
bedroom, tears blend
fragile cheekbones

with fair skin
and the remnants of blue
irises. They run down

Grandma's neck, collecting
in a murky pool at the base
of her ancient frame.

The tenth Beethoven symphony,
little-known and rarely performed,

features tantrums of tympany,
strings and brass that shatter

the perfection of human form.
You may doubt me-- my heart maintains

this cursed, forbidden work exists.
I have heard the thrashing of angel wings

and seen the flicker of wiggling flames
round the ashen remains of orchestra pits.

The heartbreak of his adagio spells
so clearly deafness and defeat

in the midst of sin at last expelled
without rumbled sigh, a single stroke

of the dry drum lends a deathly beat.
I am not the first to require salvation

nor the last to dread its implications,
what most I fear, blindly mistaking

your voice for that of a well-moved man,
glancing over my back at threatening damnation.

Can one live in the kingdom of mimicry
not failing rightly to distinguish

human achievement from divine victory?
do the flames of one burn less hotly

than the other's when life is extinguished?
When an instrument weeps is it owned by you

who formed flesh to carve the perfect phrase
though our same arms reflexively pursue

your end? Bloodless, my fingers wrap
the violin neck, set to play.

An empty rafter snap alerts
my right arm to defense; I bow

warily into the brash first
movement, crafting another voice--

whose, I do not know.
Listen for yourself, that is all,

forgiving presumptions misplaced
and my fiddle's less than godly drawl.

If this work proves only a fraud,
unhesitatingly lay me to waste:

A human form shattered
in strings and brass,

a tantrum of little tympany,
known but rarely performed,

like a tenth Beethoven symphony.

I watched the creeping run
in a stewardess' stocking

climb toward the movie screen
as her hands offered me

cream and sugar; my sister
and I were flying home

for our grandmother's memorial
service, watching Soviet cinema

somewhere over Greenland.
Slava had just postponed marriage

to repel the assault on Moscow;
Nastia, his fiance, was emerging weepily

from an underground shelter
to find her family

vaporized by an explosion.
I might have emerged as she did,

if I hadn't been stuck mid-air
in a fiberglass tube

full of sweating strangers,
relentless infants, and silent

uneasy trust in modern technology.
The cirrus clouds reminded me

of my grandmother's hair
which had once been

dark like the stewardess' stocking and
the view from Nastia's battered apartment.

Her stocking was just right.
The view was beautiful, really.

And my grandmother's hair
had taken over the world.

My sister and I sipped
coffee, exchanged glances,

descended toward
the blue cranium

and crashed into the sermon
with a troubleshoot air

on a g-string, looking up
at the eyes of our grandmother's son

as Slava lay dead across
a barbed wire fence back in Moscow.

God has hired temp help
to itemize my transgressions,
and layed off the archangels

who once heard my confessions.
My sins are listed on microfiche
for projection on cumulous screens

along with a mockingly oversized
copy of my recorded plea,
the last shabby synapse gasp

that fizzled in my skull:
"Suicide in the end is,
if anything, too dull."

The sounds of Bauzys and his cows,
a mile east, were carried here

by the wind today, resembling
bleats, a crack, and the mumbling sea.

Such a blessing to know
that Bauzys is still alive

this spring, despite the freezing spells.
The field's killed again, and I hardly mind.

So many blessings since the end of March,
but no day has been longer than this.

Our half-sprung harvester
curled up, little

monster of tender heart,
death has got you

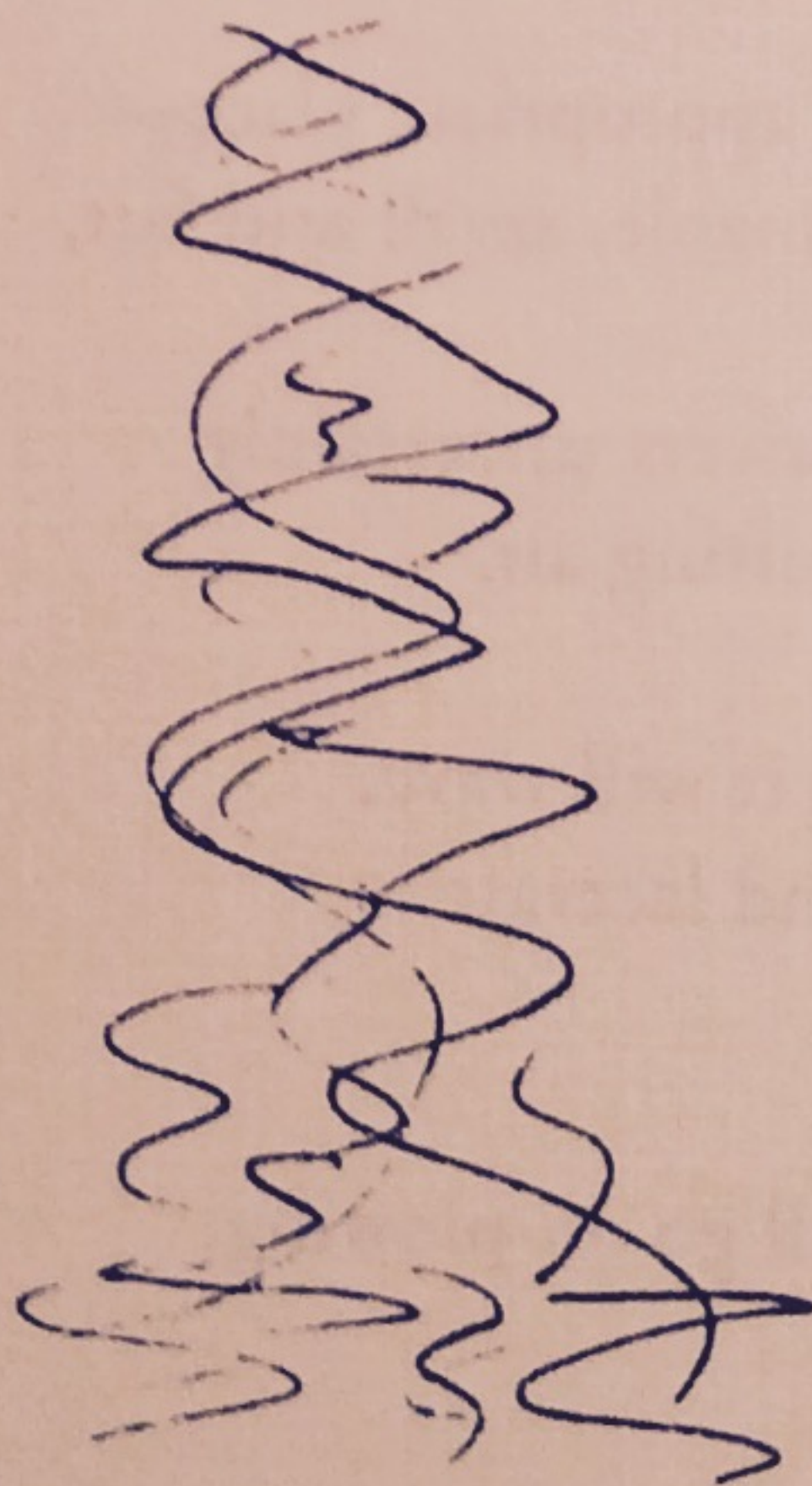
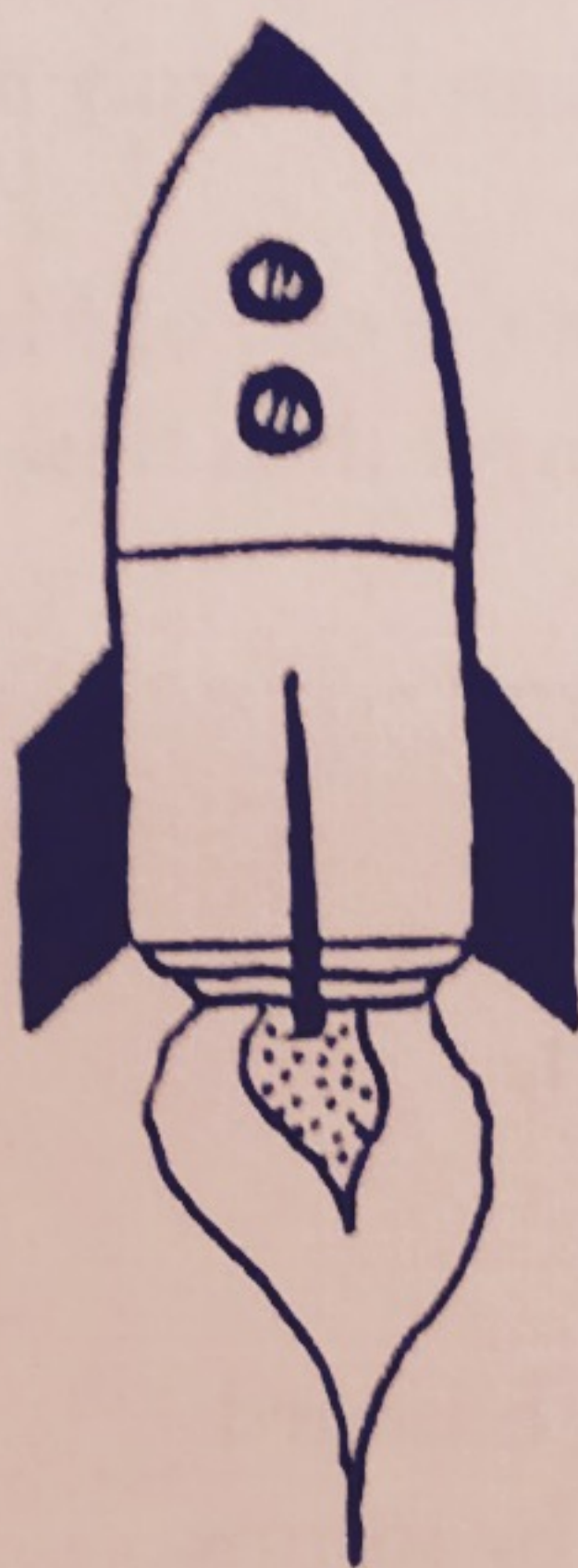
and the rest of us blue, blistered
by the cold and stilled by sorrow.

This field is an appropriate place--
solid but redeemable, small and fair,

the old grass quivers uncertainly
in the edgily shifting air.

It will roll, and it will wave.
It will thrash and lacerate.

It will bury.
And Bauzys will go on plowing.



This evening, lumps are swallowed
and jitters shaken off by heroes
in oxygen suits. Men rise up
to pick God's open pocket.

A black asbestos handkerchief tows eerily
across the night sky. Someone winces

below, others eat dinner unaware.
As the feat is accomplished,

flocks of migrating geese tumble
from the air, followed by light
aircraft, cargo vessels sink
amongst blooms of panicking algae.

Away from all this, rural beneficiaries
of the grand achievement find the stillness

unnerving. The greatest of all
wars begins in utter silence.

Unable to sleep, I sing my child a lullaby.

Do not fear the darkness.
Now there is no light to blind you.
The monsters underneath your bed,
like you, are laying down their heads.

